



October 31, 2003

**Providence man is sentenced to 17 & ½ years
in federal prison for a sawed-off shotgun**

**John Collins, a three-time convicted felon, threatened a man with a shotgun
after robbing a woman of a gold chain**

A federal judge today sentenced **John Collins**, 40, of Providence, to 210 months – 17 and ½ years – in federal prison for possessing a sawed -off shotgun. In August, Collins admitted that he threatened a man with a shotgun after robbing a woman of a gold chain. Because he has three prior violent felony convictions, Collins was sentenced as an “armed career criminal.”

The Office of the United States Attorney announced the sentence, which U.S. District Court Judge William E. Smith imposed in U.S. District Court, Providence.

The case was prosecuted under a **Project Safe Neighborhoods** initiative in which firearms cases are reviewed jointly by federal and state prosecutors to determine where best to prosecute them. Because of the robbery and the shotgun incident, Collins also faced state charges as a probation violator, so the U.S. Attorney’s Office and the Rhode Island Attorney General’s Office coordinated a dual prosecution of Collins.

At the plea hearing in August, Assistant U.S. Attorney Peter F. Neronha said that, had the case gone to trial, the government would have proven that on July 31, 2002, at approximately 11:30 PM, Collins accosted a woman near the intersection of Atwells and Harris Avenues and grabbed a gold chain from her neck. When the woman tried to get the chain back, Collins punched her in the face.

When the woman reported the assault at a nearby donut shop, a customer and a companion went looking for the assailant. They spotted a man fitting the description she had given them and, when they approached him, he pointed the barrel of a gun at one of them and fled. The two men reported the incident to Providence Police Sergeant Dean Isabella, who was on patrol nearby.

Police officers in the vicinity spotted Collins, who fled and discarded what appeared to be a sawed-off shotgun. Officers later found Collins hiding under the porch of a house on Almy Street. Other officers recovered the shotgun and the gold chain that Collins had taken.

Collins pleaded guilty to being a felon in possession of a firearm and illegally possessing a sawed-off shotgun. As an armed career criminal, Collins was subject to a minimum sentence of fifteen years in federal prison. Collins, who lived at 120 Gessler Street when he was arrested, has been detained at the state Adult Correctional Institutions since his arrest.

Providence Police and the **Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives** investigated the case. Assistant U.S. Attorney Neronha prosecuted the federal case, in coordination with Special Assistant Rhode Island Attorney General Feidlim Gill.